



ATF's Partnership with State and Local Law Enforcement

State and Local Obligations

The NIBIN network includes ATF-owned equipment that is operated by State and local law enforcement personnel, as well as a few units owned by States and operated over the ATF network. Both ATF and its NIBIN Partners have a crucial role in the success of the program. Agencies joining NIBIN must commit to maintaining adequate staff to support the program, and will need a comparison microscope and access to a bullet recovery system to testfire firearms. Building the NIBIN database requires committing human resources as well as educating law enforcement customers on the importance of resubmitting shooting evidence for inclusion and search against the database. Partner agencies must commit to entering as much evidence into the machine as possible, and to sharing intelligence information and evidence with other law enforcement agencies.

Since the program began, ATF has encouraged the use of the following priority order for entering evidence into NIBIN: 1) bullets and cartridge casing evidence from crimes where no gun has been recovered, and 2) testfires from guns seized during criminal activities or search warrants. ATF has determined that the higher the ratio of physical evidence (e.g. bullets and cartridge casings) to testfires, the more successful a laboratory can be in linking unsolved shooting cases.

In addition, because certain calibers (including .25 auto, .32 auto, .380 auto, 9mm, .38/.357, 10 mm/.40 S&W, and .45 auto) make up the vast majority of crime guns, agencies are expected to image as much recovered and testfired evidence from such firearms as possible. However, agencies are by no means prohibited

from entering evidence or testfires from firearms of other calibers if deemed appropriate.

NIBIN partner agencies must also send operations reports to the NIBIN Program office at ATF Headquarters each month. The required reports include statistical information such as entries and a hit report sheet, and examples of the necessary reports are available from local NIBIN coordinators.

ATF's Assistance

ATF provides State and local law enforcement agencies with an effective intelligence tool that many could not afford on their own, and ensures that proper protocols and standards will be maintained and followed by all NIBIN sites. ATF's comprehensive approach to supporting the NIBIN Program draws upon the expertise of special agents, inspectors, scientists, and support staff, combining advanced technology with in-house expertise in enforcing Federal firearms laws. NIBIN team members provide briefings, oversee execution of ATF's contract with FTI, support the NIBIN Board, monitor statistical reports to ensure that equipment is deployed to maximal effectiveness, oversee administrative operations of the program, and inform and assist law enforcement partners.

At each ATF field division office, one or more special agents are designated as NIBIN Coordinators. These NIBIN Coordinators work with receiving police departments and laboratories on acquisition, installation, and operation of all projectile comparison system components. They also coordinate ATF's investigative efforts, maintain quality control, and ensure that program requirements are met. Coordinators ensure that all ATF investigative resources are available to NIBIN

partners, and that NIBIN's resources are being used effectively.

Other ATF functions also provide NIBIN partners with a full range of services and assistance:

- The **ATF National Tracing Center** provides assistance to Federal, State, local, and foreign enforcement agencies by tracing guns used in crimes. It is the only facility of its kind in the world, and it received more than 206,000 trace requests in 2000. The National Tracing Center's Crime Gun Analysis Branch is responsible for various trend analyses concerning firearms-related crime.
- The **National Laboratory Center (Forensic Science Section), the Forensic Science Laboratory – Atlanta and the Forensic Science Laboratory – San Francisco** conduct firearms, toolmark, and ballistic examinations for Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies. It provides onsite (crime scene) assistance, technical advice, and expert court testimony.

ATF Laboratories contribute to Federal, State and local investigations and provide technical advice to State and local NIBIN partners.



- **ATF's Firearms Technology Branch** provides expert technical support to local law enforcement, the firearms industry, Congress, and the general public. The Branch provides technical determinations on firearms approved for importation, newly designed firearms, and firearms suspected of being involved in criminal violations. It also maintains an extensive firearms reference collection and library.
- The **National Licensing Center** is responsible for licensing all manufacturers, importers, dealers, and collectors of firearms in the United States. The Center's firearms records system provides the means to trace firearms and explosives. There are currently approximately 104,000 active Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs) in the United States.
- The **Firearms and Explosives Imports Branch** is responsible for approving the importation of firearms and explosives from foreign countries. The Branch develops summary reports, investigative leads, and technical advice and assistance involving the importation of firearms for law enforcement, the firearms industry, and the general public.
- The **National Firearms Act Branch** processes applications to register, manufacture, import, etc., certain firearms (e.g., machine guns and silencers) covered by the National Firearms Act.
- The **ATF Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative (YCGII)** is designed to identify and interrupt the illegal supply of firearms to young people through enforcement and research efforts. Currently active in 50 cities, this partnership with State and local authorities promotes the identification and investigation of suppliers of guns to youths and juveniles.
- The **Stolen Firearms Program** seeks to reduce firearms thefts from Federal firearms licensees and from interstate carriers transporting firearms. This aggressive initiative is determined to reduce the number of stolen firearms that, by their very nature, are destined to become crime guns. The initiative is a major part of the ATF Crime Gun Analysis Branch.
- The **Violent Crime Coordinators Project** stations an ATF special agent in every field office who is designated solely to serve as a liaison with State and local law enforcement, district attorneys, and

the U.S. attorney's office in matters related to suspected violations of the Federal firearms laws. It serves to initiate Federal prosecution of the same violent criminals and career offenders targeted by such initiatives as Project Exile, ATF's Achilles Project, and the U.S. Justice Department's Triggerlock Project, thus bringing greater focus on violent criminals.

- The **Armed Violent Criminal Apprehension Program** seeks to identify, investigate, and recommend prosecution of a wide range of firearms offenders: career criminals who use firearms, individuals who are actively involved in armed violent criminal activities or armed drug trafficking, and other prohibited persons in possession of firearms. The Bureau's violent crime coordinators (VCCs) coordinate efforts and liaison with State and local law enforcement, the U.S. attorneys' offices, and the local prosecutors' offices nationwide to ensure that firearms violators are prosecuted in Federal court whenever appropriate. In addition, VCCs ensure that all crime guns recovered in these cases are traced and that, when possible, all defendants are thoroughly debriefed regarding the sources of their crime guns in order to generate potential firearms trafficking leads.

Communicating with Partners

Recognizing that NIBIN is most effective when State and local NIBIN partners are well-informed, the ATF NIBIN Program uses every means to maintain close and productive contact with NIBIN partners. Letters and newsletters are sent as necessary to inform NIBIN partners of new developments in the network and ensure that they have the most up-to-date information. NIBIN Program staff also frequently address groups and appear at conferences to discuss the program.

More information is available on the Internet, at the website for the NIBIN Program (www.nibin.gov) and at ATF's main website (www.atf.treas.gov.) The websites contain many resources useful for program users and the general public, including technical information and alerts to upcoming events.

As the deployment progresses, the ATF NIBIN Program Office plans to hold regional conferences for NIBIN partners. The conferences will provide the opportunity for the ATF NIBIN Program Office to brief partners on developments and to answer their questions. We also anticipate that the conferences will allow partners to make connections and share experiences, enhancing intraregional cooperation.